

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

241951Z Sep 04

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002599

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [EC](#) [ECON](#) [EFIS](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#)

SUBJECT: NEW GALAPAGOS PARK DIRECTOR LITERALLY FIGHTS HIS WAY INTO OFFICE

REF: QUITO 2502

1. Summary. On September 22, a group of local fishermen, who have long been at odds with the park leadership over environmental regulations, stormed the office of the GNP headquarters in Santa Cruz and helped Fausto Cepeda, the newly appointed director, install himself as park director. The violent confrontation has made both U.S. and international press.

2. While the fishermen were assailing the GNP headquarters, ten GNP strike representatives were in Quito having a series of meetings with the Minister of the Environment (MOE) to negotiate a resolution to the crisis. In the end, the MOE publicly agreed to nothing, except to resume negotiations with the GNP representatives on Monday, September 27. The Embassy received a report that ten fishing boats were spotted in a no-take zone in the Galapagos. The Embassy continues to monitor the crisis closely and is pressing for quick resolution. End Summary.

Let's Talk Institutional Stability

2. On September 21, the Ambassador hosted a luncheon for four leading Ecuadorian environmentalists intimately involved with the Galapagos Islands. They were: Eliecer Cruz (leads a USAID-funded Galapagos Marine Reserve Project); Luis Suarez (Executive Director of Conservation International); Roberto Troya (Regional Representative of The Nature Conservancy); and Deborah Chiriboga (entrepreneur who is very involved in the Guayaquil conservation sector). The group discussed the current crisis but focused on long-term institutional stability of the GNP.

3. The group concurred that the best approach would be to name an interim director for one month, to permit a cooling off period. During this time, an independent commission comprised of members from various sectors would evaluate the current situation and propose a temporary solution to stabilize the park.

4. The broader goal of this commission would be to form a permanent body that would choose future park directors. That body ideally would include a mix of national and international stakeholders, but would clearly not impinge on the sovereignty of Ecuador as ultimate steward of the islands. The NGO representatives said they would propose these ideas to the MOE and other executive branch members.

Meanwhile Back at the Park...

5. On the same morning as the Ambassador's luncheon, Rogelio Guaycha, President of four fishing cooperatives and alternate congressional deputy, incited fishermen to band together, march to the gates of the GNP headquarters in Santa Cruz, and throw out the striking GNP employees. His call for action worked. About 60 fishermen showed up at the gates of the GNP and tried to forcibly enter the park grounds. The local police used tear gas and riot shields to turn away the fishermen. Some strikers were injured, but none severely.

6. The following morning, September 22, Guaycha called for another assault against the strikers. This time the fishermen successfully pushed through. They led Fausto Cepeda to the GNP headquarters, allowing him to assume his position as park director. At that point, six of the GNP employees broke ranks and decided to support Cepeda. The rest of the GNP employees remained on strike pending the outcome of scheduled meetings with the MOE.

7. The violent confrontation has received international attention. Numerous articles about it have appeared in U.S. and foreign newspapers.

GNP Employees and MOE Meet to Discuss the Crisis

8. The strike representatives, the MOE, and members of the President's staff met on the evening of September 22 and the

following morning to discuss a resolution of the crisis. The MOE declined to comment publicly on the results of the meetings.

19. Privately, the MOE and the presidential advisors agree that a commission should be established and that the employees should be given long-term contracts to further stabilize the GNP as an institution (see Reftel for specifics on strikers' demands). The sticking point seems to be replacing Cepeda with an interim director.

10. The MOE is meeting with Cepeda on September 24 in Guayaquil to discuss the situation. The MOE is disturbed by the fact that Cepeda partook in the violence and some believe he may be turning a blind-eye to illegal fishing after only one day in office. The MOE and the GNP employees agreed to meet again on Monday, September 27.

The Start of Illegal Fishing?

11. The Embassy received notification from WildAid that fishing vessels were spotted in no-take zones in the Galapagos Islands. Cepeda was informed about the situation but reportedly stated that the vessel used to monitor and investigate these activities needed fuel. The pilot of the small airplane that is also used to monitor these activities was sick. WildAid, an environmental NGO, offered to fuel the monitoring vessel and charter a plane. Cepeda accepted the offer.

12. WildAid flew over the Canal Bolivar, which is one of the most protected areas in the Galapagos. They confirmed that there were at least ten boats in this strict no-take zone. WildAid will forward photos of this to Conservation International, who will present this to the appropriate government authorities.

Comment

13. It appears that naming Cepeda as park director was meant to appease fishing interests in the run-up to local elections. Donor groups are formally expressing their concerns to the President over investments and park stability and have offered to help resolve the conflict.

14. Instability in park administration is one of the most serious problems affecting conservation in the Galapagos. Prior to Gutierrez's administration there was one park director for eight years. Since Gutierrez came into power in 2003, there have been eight directors. We continue to promote stability and conservation with all our contacts but with limited success.

KENNEY